

SAN DIEGO DAILY TRANSCRIPT

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ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION

Region may soon face water rationing

By **MONICA UNHOLD**, The Daily Transcript

The region's water reserves are dwindling to levels not seen since California's 1991 drought, experts said Oct. 22 during a roundtable discussion at *The Daily Transcript's* offices, sponsored by the law firm **Buchanan Ingersoll & Rooney LLP**. Unlike in the past, this drought is caused by environmental issues and legal decisions rather than weather.

With less water arriving in San Diego from both the north and the Colorado River, residents may see compulsory water rationing by 2009. The region is currently operating in "drought level one" of the four-stage plan, said Bob Yamada, water resources planning manager of the San Diego County Water Authority. By 2009, authorities may implement "drought level 3," at which point customers will be required to reduce their water usage by 20 percent to 40 percent.

In the current phase, water conservation is voluntary. Measures such as "The 20-Gallon Challenge" have been invoked to encourage people to cut back on their water consumption.

"Conservation is the least expensive water resource we can implement," Yamada said.

Inhibiting Southern California's access to its Northern California water supply is last year's ruling by California federal judge Oliver Wanger, limiting pumping in the Delta region between the months of December and June in order to protect the delta smelt.

"We need to figure out a way to move water sustainably," said Paul Barnes, president of **Shea Homes San Diego**.

In solving Southern California's water shortage, it is important for environmentalists, public agencies and private companies to work together and find a balance, said Michael Bardin, general manager of the Santa Fe Irrigation District.

"Folks that 20 years ago we didn't interface with, we now have to do that," Bardin said.

With between 50 percent and 70 percent of the water consumed by residential customers being used outside the home, homeowners are being encouraged to replace lawns with drought-tolerant landscaping.

"We're going to have to be rethinking the whole concept of beauty, using Mediterranean-style, low-water plants," said Yamada.

Another proposed method of cutting back water consumption is offering incentives for conservation, said Lisa Bicker of **CleanTECH San Diego**. Water departments are also looking at the possibility of charging a higher rate for a greater level of consumption. Consumers may also be charged more for water at peak times of the day, the way consumers are currently charged a higher rate for electricity during hours of the highest usage.

Another method of reducing San Diego's water consumption is using non-potable reclaimed water for landscaping. Helix Water District hopes to draw 10 percent to 15 percent of its water from reclamation. Present requirements that an individual at each site receive training in reclaimed water present a challenge to meeting the goal. Homeowners do not currently have access to reclaimed water, and in order to obtain it, they would have to be trained, said Mark Weston, general manager of Helix Water District.

Due to the cost of treatment, reclaimed water is 30 percent more costly and has the added expense of installing the "purple pipe" that conveys the water. Because of the installation cost, it is most efficient to incorporate reclaimed water into the initial design of a building, Bardin said.

Experts also see desalination as a viable local source of water. Desalination is more expensive, but reliable. The Poseidon plant in Carlsbad will have the capacity to produce 20 percent of San Diego's water when completed. While desalination is costly, it is a source that cannot be threatened by environmental or legal controversies, Bardin said.

"We have to invest in reliable local supplies," Bardin said.

Water is the lifeline of the region. When San Diego's water supply was reduced, businesses decided not to locate in Carlsbad, said Bud Lewis, mayor of Carlsbad. If water is rationed, the city will be prioritizing its water, asking residential consumers to conserve and limiting development in an effort to lessen the impact on businesses.

While water companies are preparing for the worst, there is the possibility that a weather pattern forming over the Indian Ocean may provide the rainfall needed to solve the county's drought conditions, Yamada said.

"We're preparing for things to get worse, but things may get better," Yamada said.



Keith Solar (from left), a shareholder with Buchanan Ingersoll & Rooney LLP; Mark Weston, district GM of the Helix Water District; and Michael J. Bardin, GM of the Santa Fe Irrigation District. Photo: J. Kat Woronowicz